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Literary Representation of the Self in Medieval Arabic Autobiographies and the Cultural Barriers to Self-Cognition: The Literacy Theory Perspective. Part I

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the problems associated with the relationship between the influence of writing on cognitive processes and the features of the culture within which writing appears. Classical literacy theory, with the modifications that were introduced over the course of time, was embraced as the research perspective. According to these modifications, the change in the cognitive processes and content which occurs under the influence of writing is not automatic. Every culture has at its disposal a specific array of factors which influence writing and literacy and which determine the extent to which the potential of writing will be used. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the most important cultural norms and values which, by being practiced socially, could have limited the influence of writing on self-cognitive processes—the consequences of such processes can be found in the literary representation of the self in medieval Arabic autobiographies of the 12th–15th centuries. These features were referred to as traditionalism, the domination of collective awareness over individual awareness, the acceptance of social hierarchical structure, and a Quranic vision of the limits to man's freedom.

KEYWORDS: Arabic medieval literature, autobiography, literary representation of the self, medieval Arab-Islamic culture, literacy theory

STRESZCZENIE

Literacka reprezentacja „ja" w średniowiecznych autobiografiach arabskich a kulturowe bariery samopoznania w perspektywie teorii piśmienności. Część I

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę związku pomiędzy wpływem pisma na procesy poznawcze a cechami kultury, w obrębie której przyjęcie pisma następuje. Jako perspektywę badawczą przyjęto klasyczną teorię piśmienności,

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sprofilowaną wprowadzonymi do niej z czasem modyfikacjami. Zgodnie z nimi zmiana procesów i treści poznawczych następująca pod wpływem pisma nie ma charakteru automatycznego. Każda kultura dysponuje określonym zasobem czynników oddziałujących na pismo oraz piśmienność i decydujących, w jakim stopniu potencjał pisma zostanie wykorzystany. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie najistotniejszych kulturowych norm i wartości, które – będąc obecne w praktyce społecznej – mogły ograniczyć możliwości oddziaływania pisma na procesy samopoznawcze, a których konsekwencje obecne są w literackim obrazie „ja" w średniowiecznych arabskich autobiografiach XII–XV wieku. Cechy te określono jako: tradycjonalizm, przewagę świadomości zbiorowej nad indywidualną, akceptację dla hierarchiczności oraz koraniczną wizję granic wolności człowieka.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: autobiografia, literacka reprezentacja „ja", średniowieczna kultura arabsko-muzułmańska, średniowieczna literatura arabska, teoria piśmienności

"Self-consciousness is coextensive with humanity: everyone who can say 'I' has an acute sense of self. But reflectiveness and articulateness about the self take time to grow." (Ong, 2005, p. 174)

"The perception of interiority is itself a byproduct of the literate mentality." (Stock, 1986, p. 301)

Introduction—Scope and Methodology

The subject of this article is an expression of my interest in the ever-developing scholarly tradition, instigated in the 1960s by the "Toronto school," which determined the path by which the communication-related concepts of culture developed. From the very beginning, research on the influence of the systems of communication on what can be broadly perceived of as culture was conducted in the context of various scholarly disciplines: classical philology, anthropology, literary criticism, theory of communication, and subsequently, linguistics, history, and psychology.[1] The literacy theory which emerged during the course of the research—to simplify things

1 A critical overview of the research conducted in reference to the influence of systems of communication on culture, ranging from classical philologists Milman Parry and Albert Lord to cultural psychologists Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole, may be consulted in Khosrow Jahandarie (1999).

considerably—treats writing, which is the work of mankind, as a technology that is also able to influence its creator, thus engendering fundamental changes in the institutional and mental dimensions of culture. As demonstrated by theoreticians of literacy, writing has a great potential for generating new types of culture by accelerating social change and establishing new cognitive processes.

However, the change in cognitive processes and content under the influence of writing does not always occur automatically or to the same degree. According to David Olson (1994, p. 38; also Brockmeier & Olson, 2013, p. 8), "technological determinism" does not apply here. Every culture (or subculture) has at its disposal a specific array of factors which influence writing and literacy and which determine the extent to which the possibilities of writing will be exploited.

In this article I would like to discuss the literary representation of the self in medieval Arabic autobiographies from the perspective suggested by theoreticians of literacy.[2] The aim that I set myself was to demonstrate the most important (in my opinion) cultural factors whose consequence was the form of the literary representation of the self and which, at the same time, could have limited the extent of the development of a new literary way of perceiving and ordering reality, including self-cognition.

The subject mentioned in the title calls for a number of methodological remarks. Firstly, when we speak about the literary representation of the self, the most promising source material—relatively speaking—has to do with works in which the authors write about themselves and in which they express their experiences (Leclerque, 1973, p. 447).[3] Therefore, from the perspective of the Western theory of literature we may refer to autobiographical writing. However, if the modern Western definition of autobiography[4] were to be applied to medieval Arabic literature, it would rule out the existence of such a genre. Therefore, when I use the term "autobiography" in reference to sources which were created not only a few centuries

2 The original theory has already been modified by its creators. Further research, for example that of the previously mentioned Olson, as well as studies in the field of the anthropologically-oriented history of culture, brought further verification. See, for example, Khosrow Jahandarie (1999, pp. 199–262) and Andrzej Mencwel (2006, pp. 59–98).

3 The possibility of studying the social personality through autobiographical literature was discussed by Aaron Gurevich (1995).

4 There is a debate among literature specialists over the definition of autobiography as a literary genre. A French literary specialist, Phillipe Lejeune (1975, p. 14), suggested four criteria according to which one may classify a work as an autobiography: 1) the form of language (narrative or prose); 2) the subject (the life of an individual or the story of a personality); 3) the author's situation (the identity of the author and the narrator); and 4) the position of the narrator (his/her identity with the main character and the retrospective standpoint of the narrative).

earlier but also in a different culture, I have in mind books or entries in encyclopedic compendia whose main theme is the life and the experiences of the author himself.

Secondly, the influence of writing was not uniform in all circles of intellectual elites (where the competence of reading and writing was basically widespread) in medieval Arab-Islamic culture and did not manifest itself to the same extent.[5] Therefore, I limit my considerations (with a few slight exceptions) to a milieu which was relatively homogenous as far as the intellectual aspects are concerned and which was related to the native knowledge that arose around studies of the Quran.

Furthermore, the profiling of the field of research, as far as the geographical and historical aspects are concerned, was dictated above all by cultural and intellectual dynamics. In this article, I will utilize the literature which arose in the eastern part of the Arab-Muslim world[6] in the period of the 6th/12th–9th/15th[7] centuries.[8]

Finally, one should bear in mind that in the literary representation of "the plane of content", to use Aaron Gurevich's term (1995, p. 78), overlaps with the "the plane of expression" in the form of a literary convention, the canons of rhetoric, and topoi (which were valid at a given time).[9] Both of these planes overlapped to a certain extent, so it would be extremely

5 For example, among scholars representing the sciences such as mathematical sciences, astronomy, technology, and philosophy—which were based on the long-standing intellectual heritage of conquered peoples—knowledge functioned from the very beginning in written form, which could have changed the influence of writing slightly.

6 Despite the cultural links between the Mashriq and the Maghrib, and the interpenetration of many traditions, including literary ones, the peculiar nature of the world of Muslim Spain and North Africa (which was undoubtedly determined by the cultural, religious, and social activities of various ethnic groups) would call for separate treatment in the context of this article's subject.

7 The article adopts the following sequence for listing dates: the first date represents the Muslim lunar calendar (Anno Hegirae), whereas the second date follows the European model (Anno Domini).

8 As far as the 6th/12th century is concerned, we may speak about a mature form of autobiography. The political decline of the Mamluks (648/1250–923/1517) entailed the decline of culture and intellectual life. Activity in this area of life waned. It was concentrated above all on the drawing up of copies and writing of commentaries to the works of their predecessors. The world of Islam lapsed into lethargy for a few centuries. What was being written frequently duplicated earlier examples. Until the present day, some of the manuscripts from this period have not been published or cannot be identified. The listing of autobiographies written before the 20th century with a short description or with information about their potential existence can be found in Dwight E. Reynolds (2001, pp. 255–288).

9 A similar situation occurred in the European Middle Ages, when—according to Jean Leclerque (1973, p. 476)—the author's thoughts and feelings were obfuscated by literary technique (*loci communes*, clichés, fixed phrases, formulae of humility and remorse, and other rhetorical

difficult (if possible at all) to reach the authentic extraliterary personality and the profound depths of the self. A reconstruction of the psychological state of the medieval Arab authors is also impossible due to the fact that the variables which determined it at that time cannot be examined.

The article has been divided into two parts. This part (i.e., the first one) is dedicated to the literary representation of the self in medieval Arabic autobiographies. The second part discusses the most important cultural norms and values which could have limited the influence of writing on self-cognitive processes.

Autobiography in Medieval Arabic Literature

The self continues to be the object of interest of many scholarly disciplines—not only of psychology and its subdisciplines, but also philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. By engendering many debates and polemics, it occasioned the emergence of a number of concepts which treated its nature differently—according to the research paradigm which was embraced. In the context of this article, it seems sufficient to introduce a basic dual approach to the self—subject and object—upon which the majority of the modern psychological concepts of the self are based. The basis of such an approach is the distinction between "I" and "me" which was introduced by the American philosopher and psychologist William James (d. 1910), according to whom "I" represents the private, interior sense of oneself, whereas "me" represents the self as an object (as cited in Hammack, 2014, p. 14). These are not separate realities but two aspects of one whole, for the self has the ability to be both the subject and the object.

The self in its subject aspect experiences thoughts, feelings, perceptions (either assimilating or rejecting them) and directs behavior. It creates a concept of itself and a feeling of identity for a person. However, the object-self may be observed; it is a kind of self-knowledge. Man has the ability to make himself the object of reflection and cognition, of analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating himself. The concept of oneself, created and integrated by the subject-self, provides information about various aspects of the self which is conceived of as an object in terms of its own abilities, inclinations, and experiences as well as the values which are recognized.

During the course of history, man developed a feeling of his own self, a certain image of his own person whose components were collected in

devices). They constituted a kind of defense mechanism, which ruled out the possibility of reaching the true personality of the author.

memory and communicated either in the oral or written form.[10] Understanding oneself is a cultural phenomenon, subject to historical and social changes. Man thinks about himself in terms of his own culture. According to David Matsumoto and Linda Juang (2013, p. 344), "the concept of self is part of one's cultural worldviews because how one sees oneself in relation to the rest of the world is an integral part of one's culture". Therefore, the concepts of self vary in different cultural circles (and even within subcultures) due to worldview-related differences:

> these differences in self-concepts occur because different cultures are associated with different systems of rules of living and exist within different social and economic environments and natural habitats. The varied demands that cultures place on individual members mean that individuals integrate, synthesize, and coordinate their worlds in a variety of ways, producing differences in self-concepts. (Matsumoto & Juang, 2013, p. 345)

In the context of Arabic literature from the classical and post-classical period, the term "autobiographical literature" is a source of much debate. According to the research paradigms which are embraced, it is defined as an independent literary genre or as an example of biographical literature (this point is discussed by Enderwitz, 1998, pp. 1–10, 2007, pp. 35–41). Generally speaking, according to some researchers, in Arabic literature until the end of the pre-modern period, autobiography was not developed because in fact the Arabs had not developed "a sense for individual autonomy" (Rosenthal, 1937, p. 30; Zionis, 1991, p. 61).[11] Others claim that for the authors of that period, any content that revealed their personality, what they experienced in various situations, their struggle with themselves and the surrounding world, were irrelevant to this kind of literary endeavor, whereas they could be revealed in the course of a closer study (e.g., Bustard, 1997, pp. 327–344; Kilpatrick, 1991, pp. 1–20). In one of the best-known modern treatments of Arabic autobiographies developed by the end of the pre-modern period, the author, Dwight F. Reynolds (2001, p. 9), assumes that an autobiography is "a description or summation of the author's life, or a major portion thereof, as viewed retrospectively from a particular point in time". In a situation in which the definition omits such terms as "individual" or "personality," autobiography could be formally distinguished, whereas the works which represented it

10 It was not until two centuries later that the concept of the self was used in the European context as the fundamental category of awareness: see, e.g., Marcel Mauss (1938, pp. 263–281).

11 For more information on this subject, see Susanne Enderwitz (2007, pp. 37–38).

could number approximately 140 (Enderwitz, 2007, p. 38).[12] As Susanne Enderwitz remarked, if we assume a deconstructionist method of treating a text, the works which are classified by Reynolds and other scholars within the category of autobiographical literature may actually adjust even more than traditional Western autobiographies to the postmodernist approach to "selfhood," where the concept of "I" as "a self-contained entity with a self-assured identity capable of reflexive self-expression [is] deceptive or misleading" (Enderwitz, 2007, p. 40).

Because the resolution of problems of a genealogical nature is not essential for the purpose of this article, I embrace Reynolds's definition of an autobiography, which enables us to determine the source corpus and the use of the term "autobiography" for the sake of introducing order to our discussion.

In the eastern part of the Arab-Muslim world, autobiographies were usually referred to as *sīra*[13] and *tarjamat an-nafs* (although these terms did not necessarily appear in the titles of the works themselves). Autobiography represents a kind of native literature,[14] based on biographical and prosopographical literature, whereas the latter constitutes an element of historical writing. According to the typology suggested by Chase F. Robinson (2007, p. XXV), *sīra*[15] represented biographical writing and indicated a "single-subject work that relates the life of a person", whereas *tarjama*[16] originally constituted an individual entry in prosopographical works, which contained biographical data "that mark[ed] an individual's belonging to a group." This term basically contained the idea of knowing someone in an intellectual context, which was accomplished not only through providing

12 In comparison with the remaining areas of classical and post-classical Arabic literature, this number indeed continues to be small.

13 In this article, the ALA-LC transcription is used, with the exception of Arabic terms which have long been rooted in the English language and/or widely recognized in the scholarly discourse (in which case the simplified transcription rules are applied).

14 In the context of the autobiographies of Arab physicians and philosophers of the 4th/10th–6th/12th centuries, one may perceive some influence (although a limited one) from the Greek and Persian biographical traditions. As far as Sufi autobiographies are concerned, they were spiritual autobiographies which developed within the proper experiences of mystics and they influenced to a certain extent traditional (non-spiritual) autobiographies—see Reynolds (2001, pp. 45–48) and Michael J.L. Young (1990, p. 183).

15 Grammatically speaking, the term *sīra* is the *nomina speciei* derived from the verb *sāra* ("to go," "to pass," "to proceed," "to journey"), usually translated as "a mode, manner of going," or "a way, mode, manner of acting, or conduct or life" (Lane, 2002, s.v.). For more information about the meaning of this term, see Chase F. Robinson (2007, pp. 64–65).

16 The form *tarjama* is a deverbal noun from *tarjama* meaning "to interpret sth," "to translate sth from one language into another," "to explain sth in another language," "to write sb's life," or "to write a biography, biographical notice, of sb" (Lane, 2002, s.v.).

the most important pieces of biographical information—since the reader was familiarized with a given figure and his achievements above all by quoting his works or teachings (poetry, prose, letters, bons mots, etc.). This was a kind of a commentary about a given figure (Reynolds, 2001, pp. 43–44). Over the course of time, *tarjama* developed into a "single-subject stand-alone biography," which caused a blurring of the distinctions between the genres of biographical literature and prosopographical literature (Robinson, 2007, pp. XXV, 61).

The earliest example of biographical literature is the *sīra* of the prophet Muhammad preserved in Ibn Hishām's version (d. ca. 218/833). Over time, this term began to be applied not only to a narrative devoted to the life of the prophet Muhammad, but also to other people, including autobiographical narratives (although they could be written in the third person). *Tarjama* becomes self-*tarjama* (*tarjamat an-nafs*) the moment the author introduces information about himself. Also, self-*tarjama* is not always written in the first person. Such autobiographies were frequently incorporated into a greater biographical compendium by a compiler, who could have incorporated an autobiographical note in its entirety or performed an authorial selection.[17]

Autobiographies—in contradistinction to biographies, which were characterized by a continuity of the convention—assumed various formal solutions (e.g., authors could include passages about themselves in biographical or chronographical works); hence, Reynolds (2001, pp. 48, 59) writes that "the corpus of Arabic autobiographies displays a high degree of formal variety and includes a number of highly idiosyncratic texts." Despite formal changes, the creation of self-*sīra* or self-*tarjama* was understood as "writing an account of one's life for posterity".

The earliest autobiographies began to appear in the 9th century. One of the first examples is the autobiography of a Nestorian physician, one of the most important translators of the works of Galen and Hippocrates, Ḥunayn Ibn Isḥāq (d. 260/873). Initially, the authors wrote autobiographies independently of each other. When, over the course of time, they began to circulate in compilations, they became more familiar among circles of intellectual elites. The history of literature knows clusters of autobiographical texts, written in a similar period, region, and milieu, whereby the authors frequently knew each other personally. At that time, such works

17 There are also narratives (*aḫbār*) which were incorporated into greater compilatory, non-biographical works—e.g., into geographical or *adab* ones—which are autobiographical in nature, which means that they convey the remembrances of the author himself, the memories associated with events, observations, and commentaries. An article by Hilary Kilpatrick is devoted to this subject (1991, pp. 1–20).

were written mainly by physicians, philosophers, and the representatives of other "foreign sciences" (*'ulūm 'ajamiyya*). Initially, the justification for autobiography was not incorporated; it became standard in approximately the 5th/11th century. We can observe an actual blossoming of autobiographical literature at the end of the 5th/11th century and in the 6th/12th century. A background for an autobiography could be furnished by many things, so many types of this literary tradition are indicated: academic, political, belletristic, conversion, spiritual, or syncretic autobiography, which involved various narrative traditions (Reynolds, 2001, pp. 64, 66).[18]

A Literary Representation of the Self and the Literary Means of Perceiving and Arranging Reality

One of the most peculiar features of autobiography involved authors who presented themselves by describing their own deeds or events in which they participated.[19] In other words, the self was expressed above all in a situational context. Certain concepts which could characterize the figure of the author were presented in the form of his specific activities. Autobiographies, especially academic ones, were a type of *vita* in which the author collected genealogical information, enumerated his teachers, the subjects he studied, the works he remembered, the journeys he made, and the positions he held. In one of the biographical compendia devoted to the judges of Egypt, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, a hadith scholar, judge and historian (d. 852/1449), wrote about himself in the following way:

> Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī: Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Aḥmad. From the town of 'Asqalān by origin, Egyptian by birth and upbringing, resident of Cairo. He was born in the month of Sha'bān in the year A.H. 773 [1372 C.E.] and his father died in the month of Rajab 777 [1375 C.E.]. His mother had already died while he was still a young child, so he was raised an orphan. He did not enter Qur'ān school until he was five years old and only completed memorizing the Qur'ān when he was nine. … Then [the author] travelled to Alexandria and attended lessons from its authorities at that time. Later, he went on the pilgrimage and travelled through Yemen. He attended lessons from scholars in Mecca, Medina, Yanbū', Zabīd, Ta'izz, Aden, and other cities and villages. In Yemen, he

18 Researchers also suggest different typologies, see e.g. Iḥsān 'Abbās (1996, pp. 114–130) and Shawqī Ḍayf (1956).

19 A description of the external (therefore also a description of events and activities) was peculiar to the entire bulk of biographical and prosopographical literature (Robinson, 2007, p. 62).

> met the great scholar of Arabic lexicography, a man without rival, Majd al-Dīn b. al-Shīrāzī, and received from him one of his most famous works, called al-Qāmūs fī al-lugha [Dictionary of the Arabic Language]. He met many of the learned men of those cities and then returned to Cairo. … He worked at writing books and was then appointed to the position of shaykh of the Baybarsiyya college, then with the teaching of Shāfi'ite law at the al-Mu'ayyadiyya al-Jadīda college. Then, he was appointed judge on the seventeenth of the month of Muḥarram in the year 827 [1423 C.E.]. (Al-Asqalānī, 1998, pp. 62–64; translated by Reynolds, 2001, 81–82).

Without doubt, this is one of the driest passages in the autobiographical tradition. According to Reynolds (2001, p. 82), this relation is the reason for the emergence among Western Arabists of a stereotype of a static and completely impersonal autobiographical narrative. Even if we do not oppose such a statement, we should emphasize that there are many examples of equally static autobiographies. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1169), a religious scholar and historian, is only one of many writers in whose autobiography the self is represented by narration at the specific stages of education, professional career, or journeys that had been taken (see, e.g., Stewart, 1997, pp. 346–347; Khoury, 1997, pp. 292–293):

> then I returned to my place of birth and I visited my mother in Bayhaq. I spent three months there, and it was in the year 21 [i.e., 521/1127] that I returned to Nishapur, then to Bayhaq. I entered a relationship by affinity with the governor of Rayy, the subsequent *mushrif al-mamlaka* [a title of a state official who was responsible for financial supervision in a province], Shihāb ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Mas'ūd, and my relationship with [his] family lasted many years. In the month of Jumāda al-Ūlā of the year 526 [i.e., 1132] I was entrusted with the position of the judge of Bayhaq. (Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, 1993, vol. 4, p. 1761)[20]

Autobiographies frequently resemble chronicle narration in their dynamics. Abū Shāma, a historian (d. 665/1268), incorporated information about the death of his mother into other events of the year 620/1224 which are described in chronological order:

> In this year Ibn Abī Firās led the people in pilgrimage from Iraq, and Sharaf al-Dīn, ruler of Sarkas, those from Syria. Also in this year my mother passed away, may God have mercy on her. I buried her in the foothills on the road near al-Imaj and al-Maghar, next to the wadi. I hope to

20 The complete text of the autobiography was not preserved. Yāqūt quotes excerpts and maintains the first-person narration.

> be buried next to her. Her death occurred on Saturday, the sixth of Rajab. She was pious and virtuous, may God be pleased with her. Also in this year the Amir Mubāriz al-Dīn Sunqur of Aleppo died, one of Saladdin's contingent. (Abū Shāma, 1974, p. 134; translated by Lowry, 1997, p. 314)

Sometimes the authors expressed emotions and feelings they experienced in reference to a situation by relating specific activities. For example, Aṣ-Ṣuyūṭī (a hadith scholar, exegete of the Quran, lawyer, and historian, d. 911/1505) expressed his anger associated with the incoming deadline of his first lecture to be held in the presence of one of his renowned teachers in the following way: "I went to the tomb of the Imām al-Shāfi'ī, may God be pleased with him, and requested him to intercede for me for God's help" (Aṣ-Ṣuyūṭī, 1975, p. 240; translated by Bustard, 1997, p. 332)

Such a solution also appears not only in academic autobiographies, but also in spiritual autobiographies, where spiritual experiences assume the form of specific events. It was At-Tirmidhī, (d. ca. 295–300/905–910), one of the early Sufi authors, who had already presented them by means of the oneiric convention:[21]

> I beheld in a dream that the Messenger of God entered the congregational mosque in our city, and I entered the mosque immediately afterwards, remaining close behind his neck. He continued walking until he was in the maqṣūra. I followed at his heels and was very close to him. It was as if I were almost clinging to his back, and I placed my footsteps in the same spot where he walked and so I entered the maqṣūra. Then he mounted the pulpit and I ascended immediately behind him. This went on until he reached the highest step and sat down on it, and then I sat down at his feet on the next step below where he was sitting. My right hand was toward his face, whereas my face looked in the direction of the doors that opened onto the market, and my left hand was towards the people. Then, while in that situation, I woke from my dream. (as cited in Radtke & O'Kane, 1996, p. 18)

We may see clearly that the meticulously described scene of entering a mosque and exiting the pulpit following the prophet Muhammad's footsteps corresponds with the experience of the spiritual growth of the author and the guidance of the community of believers according to his pattern.

21 Belief in dreams was very strong in the Muslim tradition—it was supported by both the Quran and the sunna of the Prophet. One distinguished dreams from [dream] visions (*ru'ya*), which were understood as a means through which God communicates with us. In a dream vision, one could receive injunctions from God himself or from his prophet, and the realization of these injunctions signified the subjection to divine will. One could be warned against peril, and sometimes one could interpret the shape of things to come.

What does this widely applied strategy attest to? From the perspective of theliteracy thesis, it may indicate that the culture failed to use the complete array of possibilities which writing offers in the sphere of cognition. Undoubtedly, one must remember that such a situation is not uncommon in certain cultures. The complete transition from orality to literacy is a long process and the so-called transitional mode of communication frequently functions within a literacy that has been established to a greater or lesser extent.[22]

One of the basic properties of writing is above all its "separating" property that occurs at multiple levels. Its diaeretic function was expressed by Walter J. Ong (1986, p. 36) in the following way: "[Writing] divides and distances all sorts of things in all sorts of ways." Due to its potential to decontextualize, writing enables the object of knowledge to be distinguished from the subject (Ong, 1986, p. 38). The object of cognition does not have to remain immersed in specific situations—it may be abstracted from them. By inspecting the "distinguished" object of cognition, the subject may describe and examine it (Havelock, 1963, p. 208). In other words, after the adoption of writing, at some point language begins to be perceived as a thing which is composed of words combined by the instruments of syntax, as an entity which is independent from the things to which it refers. At some stage of its development, writing—as a model for language—furnishes categories which enable us to think about the constituents of speech (Olson, 1994, pp. 134–140). Therefore, it contributes to the establishment of concepts which generate a new awareness, to the establishment of a mind which acquires the ability to think independently and to reflect consciously in the place of mental identification. It facilitates the development of abstract thinking which is necessary for the development of knowledge, including self-knowledge, which facilitates the operation of concepts which exist at a considerable level of generality. Thus, it provides us with the possibility to formulate general judgments about ourselves and to arrange them hierarchically.

It was Eric Havelock (1963, pp. 199–200), followed by Ong (1986, pp. 37–38), who pointed out that thanks to writing, the self was separated as an independent, self-steering awareness (of one's own internal world), pursuing an impulse in itself, operating according to its own will. Even if writing did not cause this automatically—even if the process of the development of subjectivity lasted many centuries and even though in the

22 A culture which uses writing but in which texts are written predominantly for listeners (instead of readers) is sometimes called an "auditory" culture. At such a stage of culture, texts no longer have a formulaic structure, but they continue to differ from texts which emerged in a culture which interiorized writing to a considerable extent (Godzich, 1994, pp. 79–80).

Western world (and also in Arab-Muslim cultural circles, due to the influence of Western models) it was associated with the modern era and print—it was the adoption of writing which initiated historic changes in this area.

Parenthetically, Soviet psychologist and neuropsychologist Alexander Luria (d. 1977) conducted research (in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan) that aimed to describe the operational thinking of illiterate, semiliterate, and literate people. Even though the research was not devoted to the possibilities of literacy, it confirmed the findings of the theoreticians of literacy.

The results of that research may be summarized as follows: the analysis of one's own mental features failed in the non-literary group. The respondents either refused to answer or attempted to describe these features by presenting specific, material aspects of their lives. The request to describe oneself was understood as a request to describe the external conditions of one's life. The respondents described their internal features by describing external forms of behavior—one's drawbacks were understood as material and situational defects. The evaluation of one's behavior, the description of one's defects in terms of internal rather than external life, was noted when Luria dealt with people who demonstrated a certain standard of literacy. In the narrations provided by people who were educated, new spheres of life appeared (social experience, an awareness of oneself as a participant in social life); the analysis was more conscious. In the statements that were made, one could perceive the ability of the respondents to represent not only the external reality, but also the world of social relations and finally their own internal world (in relation to other people). This ability was proportional to the degree of literacy (Luria, 1976, pp. 146–159).[23]

As we return to the proper subject of my article, we should emphasize that the medieval Arab-Islamic culture was a manuscript culture. In the first centuries after the Quran was written down, texts functioned merely as a mnemonic aid, especially for scholars, lecturers, and the students who made notes during lectures. Although texts began to assume the form of an actual manuscript book (in Greek, *syngramma*)[24] after the 9th century, its appearance as an account furnished with the means to completely convey illocutionary capabilities, a completely autonomous account understood as a representation of individual thought which liberates one from a community and "allows for the contemplation of alternative responses and the trying on of new emotions" (Riesman, 1993, p. 424) was not possible.

23 Changes in mental processes even at a slight degree of literacy were also attested by John C. Carothers's research (1959, pp. 307–320).

24 For a more comprehensive discussion, see Gregor Schoeler (2006, pp. 45–61). He uses the Greek term *hypomnēma* to refer to private notes which did not function as manuscript books *sensu stricto*.

One of the reasons for this was the fact that books functioned in a culture which favored oral/auditory forms of transmission, and thus the creators and consumers of culture (subculture) belonged to the same community of memory through the internalization of the texts which were written.

Memorization and oral transmission were a deeply-rooted tradition in the Arab community. There was a considerable cultural emphasis on the memorization of the Quran, the sunna of the prophet Muhammad, poetry, proverbs, and anecdotal material among the intellectual elites. As far as scholarship and education was concerned (especially the scholarship which developed around multifaceted studies in the Quran), until the end of the pre-modern era the basic model for the transmission of content was listening, and the direct contact of the teacher with the student was the basic principle which governed the process of education. Literary salons (*mujālasāt*) were governed by similar principles, and starting in the middle of the 3rd/9th century they became a prestigious institution—a center for poets, writers, and enthusiasts of cultural life (Ali, 2010, p. 38).

However, it was not only manuscript books and the preference for oral/auditory forms of transmission that made writing modify the style of communication and the mode of thinking in a limited way.[25] The complexity of the problem leads us to examine the dominant worldview-related evaluation in a broader context and to distinguish some cultural causes which could have "regulated" the influence of writing. These causes will be presented in the second part of the article.

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25 Printing brought the greatest capabilities for decontextualisation (Riesman, 1993, pp. 423–424).

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